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SUBJECT: SISTANI REP WARNS AGAINST EXCLUDING SADRISTS

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Rob Waller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a sermon delivered on Friday, April 18, at the Imam al-Husayn Shrine in Karbala, Sheikh Abd al-Mahdi al-Karbala'i, the representative of the higher religious authority, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, addressed a variety of issues, including the upcoming provincial elections, the ongoing crisis in Sadr City, and the need for better government services. Regarding the upcoming elections, Karbala'i stressed the importance of transparent, fair elections in which all parties are allowed to participate. He added that the elections should follow an 'open list' system and urged all Iraqis to participate in them. Karbala'i also weighed in on the current crisis in Sadr City, stating that though the GOI has the right and duty to ensure stability and security, they also have a duty to provide basic services to the people, something that Karbala'i believes the GOI has failed to do in Sadr City and other parts of the country. End summary.

12. (C) In his Friday sermon at the Imam al-Husayn Shrine in Karbala, Sheikh Karbala'i stressed the importance of the upcoming elections, stating that "it is necessary that these elections take place in accordance with a mechanism and rules to guarantee holding these elections with transparency and great fairness." In what can be viewed as a direct response to PM Maliki's call to prohibit the Sadrists from participating in the provincial elections if they do not disband the Jaysh al-Mahdi, Karbala'i stated that "all components, whoever they may be, should be allowed to participate in these elections." He warned that there would be "serious negative effects if some components are denied the right to participate," in the upcoming elections. Karbala'i also said that the provincial elections should be based on an 'open list' system, which will not only give the people freedom of choice, but will also ensure that the most qualified and competent individuals are elected. In Karbala'i's estimation, any attempt to subvert the population's freedom to choose will "shake the citizen's confidence in the mechanism of elections."

13. (C) Addressing those citizens who have grown disillusioned by the democratic process because their "hopes and aspirations" have not been met and who consequently believe that there is no reason to participate in the upcoming elections, Karbala'i countered that "this vision and viewpoint are incorrect." Conceding that some politicians have been remiss in their duties and "that many of the citizens' aspirations and expectations have not been achieved," Karbala'i reminded the congregation that many of their hopes and desires have been achieved. Reiterating the importance of the upcoming elections, Karbala'i suggested that the public has an opportunity to elect leaders who will focus on their needs and demands, and that their participation in the electoral process will ensure the election of "competent, honest, and sincere people who work in the interest of this country."

14. (C) Turning his attention to the ongoing crisis in Sadr City, Karbala'i acknowledged that the state had "to take the

necessary steps to ensure security and stability, respect for order, and enforcement of the law." Yet, he was also quite critical of the GOI and their failure to provide basic services, claiming that "all citizens in that city have been deprived of many basic services, particularly water, health, and food services." Continuing, he argued that countless innocent citizens have suffered as a result of the current fighting in Sadr City, and urged the government to compensate these victims. Karbalai pointed out that rulers have many duties, which include "serving the people, ending the suffering of many citizens, meeting their needs, and ending injustices inflicted upon them." He added that rulers should consult with the people on a regular basis to hear their grievances and take the appropriate steps to address their grievances. If this is not done, "this or that social segment would perhaps explode because the injustices inflicted on them were not lifted and their demands were not met," a thinly veiled critique of the GOI's culpability in the current standoff with the Sadrists.

15. (C) Comment: Karbalai's assertion that all parties should be able to participate in the elections is a direct rebuke of PM Maliki's desire to exclude the Sadrists from the upcoming elections. In addition, while strongly acknowledging the power of the state and its need to enforce law and order, Karbalai did not insist that the GOI has a monopoly on arms, which could be viewed as implicit recognition of the Sadrists' right to maintain a militia. In criticizing the GOI for being inattentive to the needs of its people, Karbalai also has placed some of the blame for the current crisis back on the GOI, while at the same time suggesting a way out of the crisis through better governance

and provision of services. End Comment.  
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